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ABSTRACT

A collaborative study examined early childhood teachers' philosophies and practices as they pertained to developmentally appropriate practices and their influence on inner-city early childhood settings. Data were collected by recording conversations among five teachers. Excerpts indicate agreement over interrelated developmental areas, curriculum, teaching strategies, and parent-family relations, as suggested by developmentally appropriate practices and their successful implementation. Constraints of time and "institutional" expectations, however, limit such implementation. The collaborators disagreed regarding the place: of skills instruction and accountability; of teacher-directed, large group instruction; of extrinsic reward structures; and of the teacher's role in discipline. Also identified were issues that remained unclear, such as age and individual appropriateness, appropriate and inappropriate practices, sources for developmentally appropriate practices, lack of guidelines to implement them, and lack of emphasis on importance of family and community. The final concern was how "inner-city" settings are the same as and different from "mainstream" schools and communities. Based on these conversations, it is recommended that all early childhood educators examine developmentally appropriate practices and assess how they compare to their own teaching practices. (BAC)

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APPROPRIATE PRACTICES IN NON-MAINSTREAM SETTINGS: PERSPECTIVES OF INNER-CITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

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Introduction

This presentation is the report of a collaborative study of the philosophies and practices of early childhood teachers who work in inner-city settings. The collaborators met twelve times for 1 1/2 to 2 hours during the 1993-94 school year, critiquing developmentally appropriate practices (dap) as described by NAEYC (Bredekamp, 1987) and comparing dap to their own classroom practices. Conversations were recorded on audio tape, then transcribed verbatim. Early sessions' transcripts were analyzed by the group and later sessions were designed to look more closely at patterns discovered in the initial data analysis. A final analysis revealed generalizations that characterize the relationships among these educators' perspectives and the NAEYC guidelines.

The collaborators are Beverly McCarthy, Mary Mason, Mary Kidwell, Dorothy Brice, and Amos Hatch. Beverly McCarthy is service facilitator of the S.E. Hill and Fair Garden Family Community Centers; Mary Mason teaches the 3- and 4-year-olds at Fair Garden Family Community Center; Mary Kidwell and Dorothy Brice are kindergarten teachers at S.E. Hill Family Community Center; and Amos Hatch is an early childhood professor at the University of Tennessee. S.E. Hill and Fair Garden are located in inner-city Knoxville and are Knox County School System Family Community Centers that include pre-school programs supported by federal funds. Three of the educators are African-American, and two are European-American.

We will present several generalizations from our study and provide excerpts from our data to clarify and contextualize the meanings these hold for us. Our intent is not to portray these generalizations as holding true for all contexts like ours, but to describe how they influence our practices in the settings in which we work every day. It is our hope that by understanding our findings and the processes we went through others will find new ways to think about their own settings and practices.

The generalizations that organize this paper are: (a) We agree with much of dap and implement it successfully in the settings in which we work; (b) Several factors that are out

of our control limit how well we can implement some parts of dap with which we agree; (c) We have mixed feelings or disagree among ourselves about some of the dap standards; (d) We see some places where dap is unclear, confusing, or insufficient; and (e) We struggle with issues related to how "inner-city" schools and communities might be different from "mainstream" settings. Following the presentation of these generalizations, we will offer some conclusions and implications.

We are able to implement large parts of dap with which we agree

We recognize, along with dap, that all areas of children's development are interrelated and we work hard to provide experiences that "meet children's needs and stimulate learning in all developmental areas--physical, social, emotional, and intellectual" (Bredekamp, 1987, p. 54). Several statements illustrate our commitment to addressing the needs of the whole child, especially the often neglected emotional development of young children:

> Beverly: I think the curriculum is the total environment of the child. And I think we get caught looking at curriculum as something written. Only you can't write down what this child needs emotionally. That has to come through the interaction of the teacher and the child, and the children to the children. You know everything happening in the room is curriculum, not just the written down parts.

> Dorothy: I like sitting in a group, a small group especially, and being able to communicate with a child emotionally. You know this child may fall in my arms and cry because something happened to her. And it's important, this emotion. They talk about the physical, emotional, and social. And I put less emphasis on the cognitive, because at five, we've got a few more years to develop. You know, we punch this in that you must learn that this is an addition sign. It's coming, it will

come. But the emotional side of a child is much more important. 'Cause if they're not emotionally prepared to take on the math and science, that's laying frustration on a child. Especially when you still see this child has this hanging over his head that he wasn't able to express. So I like talking and I like listening to the kids a lot in my room.

Mary Kidwell: We need to think about the emotional part. We've always heard that if you have a hungry child, a hungry child's brain doesn't process like a child who's full. And if you have a child who's hungry emotionally, or even socially, who can't get along with people--if that's the biggest goal that needs to be met in their life then that's what you need to focus on.

We also agree on the general description of curriculum and teaching strategies suggested in dap. We try to provide environments that encourage children to explore, to select many of their own activities, and to be physically and mentally active. As Mary Kidwell explained,

Mary Kidwell: Well, that's how young children learn, and teacher directed lessons don't..., I can't see that they are learning as much if you are doing just a teacher directed lesson--where there's a right or a wrong answer and you're telling them everything. All they're doing is passively responding, if they're responding at all. And I think that active responding is what we want. We want to see what it is they're getting out of what we're teaching.

Parent-family relations is another area on which we see close agreement with the dap standards. The whole concept of the Family Community Centers in which we work is based on the idea of working in partnership with families and the communities served by

our schools. An interchange between Beverly and Mary Mason demonstrates the connections:

> Beverly: What we're trying to do at the new school [Fair Garden] and at this school [S.E. Hill] is expand the curriculum to include the family, and as many families as we can, so that we can influence, maybe not change, but influence behaviors that are happening to the child at home. They can come here and get parenting education, see what's happening in the classroom, help relieve stressful situations that cause other things to happen out there, so that you can have some overflow or some spin-offs from the school curriculum that help in the home. Because it is almost unfair to have two different standards you're trying to teach a four-year-old to live by.

> Mary Mason: Parent involvement is most important. To bring that parent in, like we're doing now, is definitely going to help with the school situation, as well as the home situation. Because we're seeing it already. Just this morning I received 2 or 3 packages of things from parents that we can use. Their interest is really going good. Now, like Dorothy was saying, you do have one or two that you're going to have a concern with 'cause there's no feedback at all. But on a whole, now I think we're really good in parent involvement.

We are limited in how well we can implement some parts of dap with which we agree.

The constraints that keep us from implementing some parts of dap with which we are in agreement have been a pervasive concern throughout this investigation. Factors that constrain us include: (a) the limited amount of time available; and (b) expectations tied to school district, state, and Chapter I programs. Time and these "institutional" expectations

are linked together. If we did not have to deal with state, district, and Chapter I guidelines, we would have more time for dap approaches and activities. Several quotes are included below to demonstrate the extent of the limitations we face:

> Dorothy: Like Mary Kidwell was saying, we have certain goals that we have to reach for each child before the end of a particular school year. If this particular child hasn't understood a particular concept, well, he just doesn't understand. You look at the differences between the appropriate practices and the inappropriate practice that the teacher is doing, then look at our guidelines of what we have to reach: it's just like gasoline and fire. It doesn't work. To us, we're not doing what we need to be doing according to dap. But look at what is mandated for us to do, you know, as teachers, kindergarten teachers. We have to follow this set of rules here. So it's difficult, really difficult.

> Mary Mason: I'm laughing because we just finished talking about the insect unit and we're always reaching for more time, more time to work on a particular topic scheduled for that day. And there's just so much that we're required to offer....Like I was saying, we're pushing. There's so much in the curriculum and there are so many things they expect us to do. We need to make sure our math skills are being taught--social studies, science, health, all those. But then, you have to follow the guidelines.

> Mary Kidwell: I think dap is a wonderful practice, but it's very difficult for me to do that, especially when you have the expectations of the state, of Chapter I. With Chapter I, we have to have the skills listed, we have to have the days we taught them. Then I write down the names of the children who didn't, who were not able to grasp that concept, and then I have to write down a date that I'm going to re-

> teach it to those children and document all that....But we have those rigid expectations because that's what's expected of us.

We have mixed feelings or disagree among ourselves about some dap standards.

Our discussions were full of friendly arguments about the applicability of dap to the settings in which we work. In the analyses of our year-long conversation, we discovered four areas of dap with which we have mixed feelings or disagree among ourselves: (a) the place of skills instruction and accountability; (b) the place of teacher-directed, large-group instruction; (c) the place of extrinsic reward structures; and (d) the teacher's role in social-emotional development.

In the "Integrated Components of Appropriate and Inappropriate Practice for 4- and 5-year-old Children," an inappropriate practice under the Curriculum Goals heading reads: "Children are evaluated only against a predetermined measure, such as a standardized group norm or adult standard of behavior. All are expected to perform the same tasks and achieve the same narrowly defined, easily measured skills" (Bredekamp, 1987, p.54). Several conversations took place around the issues imbedded in this inappropriate practice. What follows is an edited version that collapses several conversations on this topic:

> Beverly: But I don't think there's so much wrong with this. This over here [points to inappropriate practice]. It's the timing of this that I'm talking about. I don't see a whole lot wrong with teaching skills; that's how I learned. I probably didn't get a lot of whole language; I got a lot of phonics.
>
> Mary Mason: There's really nothing, you know, wrong with this.
>
> Beverly: It's just the timing of this I think is the problem.

Dorothy: These kids do not care about letters and letter sounds, I'm telling you.

Beverly: We start September with this. My point is that I see nothing wrong with the inappropriate. I think this inappropriate practice becomes inappropriate in terms of the timing that skills are presented. I think the key over here for appropriate... looks to me like they're describing all the ways that you can provide opportunities to see how reading and writing are useful: by reading stories, by doing poems, by doing dramatic play. These are ways to show them that reading is appropriate. But I see nothing wrong with providing a meaningful amount of skills instruction at some point in the year when the child shows that he is developmentally ready to do this. So I see them both. But watching and monitoring the timing of when you introduce it. That's my point.

Mary Kidwell: I don't like the idea of isolated skill development. I think we learn things in wholes. We don't learn one thing at a time. And that's what whole language is all about. What does it matter if you know the letter or not, and the sound of a letter? When you know the word, you'll eventually learn the letter. And what it looks like and what it sounds like, and all of that.

Beverly: But we did used to learn that way. That's my only point with that. With the philosophy, and it's just philosophical argument because I also believe in the whole language approach as being a better approach to get where you're going; but I don't think you can't get where you're going with the old approach. Because many of us came out of the old approach and we got where we wanted to be--which was to learn how to read, basically, okay? Whether we developed an appreciation for books or became good readers or leisurely readers and loved the language and

all that--we might not have done that. Which I guess wasn't the point at the time. The point when I was coming through was to learn to read, I'm sure. But we're trying to get at more in the whole language.

Mary Mason: Well, at one time, when I was working with the five-year-olds, it was rote counting and working with the letters, you know A B C D. Just going with that. And at that time, it seems as though the kids were doing a lot of memorizing. And now, with this High Reach unit that we're working on, it seems to be geared more towards the appropriate way to do it. Now, because they include all the areas that the children enjoy and they love doing--like the science table, the math table, the art table, you know. They have different activities that they can do.

Mary Kidwell: There's a dichotomy of the skill-based versus holistic learning approach. In the past, we had a lot of skills: phonics, phonics, phonics. And now we're going more to the holistic teaching, simply because we realize that children learn better when you give them the whole. However, sometimes teaching phonics is a must because some of the rules and ways to apply them help the children--well it actually gears them up for first grade, second grade, and on, in reading.

Dorothy: You talked before about their names being important. And doing the letters in their name being more important than trying to go down the whole alphabet teaching letter sounds and letter recognition and whatnot. Which reminded me the consultant last week said something that was important. She said that it doesn't matter if the children don't know the letters because it doesn't take them knowing the letters to be able to read.

Mary Mason: I understand exactly what Dorothy is saying because I feel like we're still in-between. I was thinking about how the system makes us inappropriate. Like Mary was saying, what is expected, to a certain extent, is them to be working with letters. They're working on the letter J, you know. It's just certain things that you're expected to accomplish, and we have to document that we're doing it and that's where I think the inappropriateness comes in because this is really what is expected of us.

Mary Kidwell: And it is so difficult. It really is. Just like you said with the J, we do letters every week. The sound of the letters. And activities. And we did a parent take home activity and some of those children got it when the parents were able to reinforce what we were doing.

Beverly: But on assessment, I don't think I see so much wrong with trying to find out what a child knows some way, some type of way. I think standardized tests become bad when you use them like dap was talking about for placement or something like that. That seems wrong to me. But I don't see a whole lot wrong with knowing how your children, how these children rate so to speak, with all the kids in the nation or whatever. I don't see too much wrong with that.

Mary Mason: You know, I'm sure we're going to have to have something to enter on the child's records. And at the end of the year, we need something to tell whether the child is making progress or not. But to me the test is just entirely, you know, it's just too . . .

Beverly: And how do you document this? How do you document that you are viewing each child uniquely? Show me something. What's your evidence or do

you have something to show that I'm looking at the skills of each child individually? My question is what is the purpose of your instruction? What are you measuring your instruction against? Just what do you think kids ought to know?

Dorothy: I'm looking at it from a four- or five-year-old's point of view.

Beverly: Well, what do you think a four-year old-ought to know? Is that what you're teaching? What you would like to be able to teach? You know what I'm saying; what are you teaching against?

Dorothy: Against?

Beverly: Yeah. What's your purpose; what's your measuring stick?

Mary Kidwell: Against standardized norms.

Beverly: What's your measuring stick?

Dorothy: There are fun things in it, you know. It's not just sitting and doing and coloring. You have good activities with it. It's just the fact that you have to get used to it.

Beverly: So this is one of the examples that we were talking about as being inappropriate for NAEYC, but may be appropriate for this group. I wish I knew other words they could use [instead of appropriate and inappropriate] to get at what they're trying to get at.

Similar discussions took place around the appropriateness of direct instruction and large group activities in early childhood classrooms. As is demonstrated in the edited conversation below, the group had mixed feelings about NAEYC's position as reflected in statements from the inappropriate practices side. Examples from the dap handbook include: "The teacher directs all the activity, deciding what children will do and when; Large group, teacher-directed instruction is used most of the time; Teachers dominate the environment by talking to the whole group most of the time and telling children what to do" (Bredekamp, 1987, pp. 54-55):

> Mary Kidwell: Of course we have some teacher directed lessons. We have to. That's mandated. Not only that, I think it's not too much. As long as it's not too much.
>
> Dorothy: This is what I'm saying. It's not an everyday thing. It's not where I'm sitting down or I'm standing over 'em with a ruler saying, 'Nnnnnno, it's not right, it's not right!" It's like in group time, if I wanted to talk about a new culture of African people, or Greek, or whatever. You know, I might just sit and show them the pictures of different cultures. And I'm telling them about it. These kids have never seen anybody not wear clothes before and live in trees. They're gonna say, "Well why? What are they doing?" Maybe they can figure it out that they don't live here because they've never seen anybody live up in a tree before. But there is somebody that does in the world. So by me explaining and being able to help them comprehend this lifestyle, am I inappropriate in that? Because that is direct, I'm sitting with a large group and teaching them that. I don't know....

Beverly: You know a lot of basic discoveries don't...I don't think you have to personally point everything out for them to discover. I think with the right environment set up, if you never said a word, they're gonna discover. At least, they'll begin to discover, without saying a word.

Dorothy: True. I know that there are some things that they're automatically gonna know. It's raining outside. This is how it looks raining outside. But, the buds on this tree are about to bloom. That's something that most children would never even notice, until you tell them or point it out.

Mary Mason: Until you point it out.

Dorothy: Unless you point, actually point it out. For one thing, they don't even know what it is. Most of them want to pick it off. And we say, "Oh don't pick that off. Pretty soon there's gonna be a bud. Soon there'll be a bloom. Soon there'll be a leaf." You see what I'm saying? They would not understand that unless I say, "Hey, let me show you. Let's watch it. Let's discover how this is going to bloom."

Beverly: Okay. I'm not disagreeing with you, really. I don't think I am anyway. I'm saying you can help kids discover without saying a word. By setting up an environment.

Dorothy: It's just like with me. If somebody did not inform me on my new car that, Miss Brice, you must put oil in your car, okay? I will soon discover that I need to put oil in my car when it locks up. But somebody had to initiate my thinking. They had to help me to know that there would be a sudden change.

Beverly: You didn't discover anything then. You were told something. You learned something from what somebody told you. You didn't discover. You would have discovered it if it had locked up.

Dorothy: They told me that, Beverly. You see what I'm trying to get to? Do you understand what I'm trying to get to?

Beverly: I know that they told you that. You didn't learn it on your own.

Dorothy: They have to inform me. We have to inform these children of things that are happening. Things that will happen.

Mary Mason: Right. I think of this child that I had spoken about earlier. We went out on the playground last week--one of the only sunny days we had. I said, "Look down" and we all looked down and I asked James what he saw. And he could not figure out that his shadow was down there until I pointed out: "Look, we both have something right here." And I explained to him--I said, "Look there's my shadow. When I turn around it's behind me." And he finally figured out there was his shadow too. But he would never, he never knew when I was doing my arm like, "Look, something's up, something's down." He never figured it out.

Dorothy: I just still believe that there are a lot of things that children miss. Natural things that they miss because we don't tell them or show them or point them out.

Mary Kidwell: Or explain language development. Even like when they're working with clay or playdough or water. Talk about what it feels like. Or what it seems to be like. Or where you've seen it before. Relate it to something.

Amos: So the opposite of discovery is telling everything? You're the source of knowledge? You give the information and they receive it? Those are two extreme positions.

Dorothy: I'm not with the extreme position. I mean, I wouldn't want to tell just every little teeney weeney thing. You know. I do believe that there has to be room for their own discovery. All I'm saying is there are times when I feel there is a need to help them notice changes.

Amos: I think that the position you played out very well is not universally accepted as the definition of facilitating. I think we can add something to the discussion by talking about it in the way that we have, because some people think appropriate practice means letting them discover everything.

Mary Kidwell: But you can't. You can't do that. I mean our role is to help them develop in our society. And they'd never learn letters, how to write, why we write, why we learn, the reasons for any of that, without us pointing it out. There are a lot of things of course that are required by the state or by our school system. A lot of things such as having them do large group, having them do skill-based instruction, which I don't like. However, at times, I like to teach them to do something with the group. I think that is necessary. And I think NAEYC does not like the large group. I like a little bit of that, because that's reality. In real life, we're gonna just continue to do that.

In the dap section on Motivation, the inappropriate practice reads: "Children are required to participate in all activities to obtain the teacher's approval, to obtain extrinsic rewards like stickers or privileges, or to avoid punishment" (Bredekamp, 1987, p.56). The issue of using extrinsic rewards to motivate children was a concern of our group. An edited conversation that includes some of our comments related to this description of inappropriate practice follows:

> Mary Kidwell: For some children I think it works. I had never seen any of this in any of the daycares I was in or any of the schools I have been in. Until I came here, I had never seen all the stickers and candy and everything. But you know it may have to do with the school.
>
> Dorothy: Well as far as the disagreement on it, it says that children are required to participate in all activities to obtain a sticker. That's not my standard as far as the stickers or the rewards. I think children deserve something, especially when they're learning. You know these are not "on-the-job" kids that have to earn a paycheck. But I think a lot of times the encouragement that results in the reward is special to some children--to a lot of children. For one child to feel good about himself because his behavior was excellent today, whereas before it was just awful, and to be able to hand him something that he's earned because he's tried hard, I think it's okay.
>
> Mary Mason: Yesterday, the behavior of one of the children in my class was just totally out of order. We sat him down and talked to him and told him we're going to write an unhappy note to his father; and we hope that we could write a positive, a happy note tomorrow. And we saw an improvement today.

Beverly: And you made sure he got a happy note.

Mary Mason: He got a hug from the teacher and a happy note, and it made his day. You would think that it made his year. He was so happy.

Beverly: Would that not still go with extrinsic rewards?

Mary Mason: The hug? Or the happy note?

Beverly: The note, happy or sad. That was an extrinsic reward. You get a happy note if you act good. Same thing as you get a good sticker if you act good or a popsicle. You see what I'm saying?

Mary Kidwell: And well, some children need that. Some, you know...if the children have had it in a class before. If children haven't ever had to do things on their own and gained enjoyment out of it, that's a way to teach them that, or to help. Even though it's extrinsic, eventually it can become intrinsic. I still don't like it.

Beverly: But it works! I mean if it ain't broke don't fix it.

NAEYC's description of appropriate and inappropriate practices in the area of "Guidance of social-emotional development" includes some language that stimulated discussion in our study. Two of the statements that caused us to closely examine our practices were: "Teachers facilitate the development of self-control in children by using positive guidance techniques such as modeling and encouraging expected behavior, redirecting children to a more acceptable activity, and setting clear limits" (appropriate); and

"Teachers spend a great deal of time enforcing rules, punishing unacceptable behavior, making children sit and be quiet, or refereeing disagreements" (inappropriate) (Bredekamp, 1987, p. 55). The following conversation captures some of our perspectives on these issues:

> Dorothy: Wow. I'm bad! It really sounds like I'm just one of those wicked teachers. That's not how it is. It sounds kind of bad, but I have found that sometimes, redirecting, it just hasn't helped in some situations. It sounds like loud voices, stern voices are bad. If you could just see it in a setting, you would understand what I'm talking about and how I'm referring to it . In some situations, redirecting just doesn't work. You have a lot of arguments. Little kids love to fight each other about little things, but end up being friends the next second after they're through. And sometimes redirecting works and sometimes it doesn't because those two are still going to be at it. The inappropriate behavior here...it says the teacher spends a great deal of time with kids sitting. Sometimes, putting a child away from the group, you have to do that. I have to do that with one particular child of mine. I have to move him from the group because he's a constant distraction. You know it may sound like we're doing him a raw deal, but if I'm trying to get a concept across and he's constantly thumping somebody's head, or he's constantly pulling on somebody, there's no way I'm going to be able to get that concept across because I'm constantly being interrupted. You know. So he has to be removed.
>
> Mary Mason: If it's helping the situation, classroom situation, if that child needs to be pulled, you know, and maybe a change of environment for a few minutes, then why not? If he's going to come back with a better attitude.

Dorothy: One time, another teacher and myself were trying to get a kid to do right, and this particular teacher said, "Now I want you, Johnny, please don't do that, I want you to get in line." Well this kid, I mean he didn't even wanna look her in the face. And then when I came up I said, "Did you not here what she said? She needs you to get in line, now!" And the kid got in line. She even asked the kid, "Why didn't you do it when I told you to do it? I'm the one who wants you to do it." He told her, "'Cause you don't have the right kind of voice." Now this is a kid telling a teacher this. See? So there are times when I have to get stern, you know, in a sense where I have control. This is my own personal view.

Amos: That's what we want.

Dorothy: And I don't want the impression that I'm the mean wicked witch. I discipline in a loving manner. I have to take up for myself because some people get the wrong idea about my technique of discipline. Where if I'm looking at a kid and I am really upset with his behavior, my expression may be that of dislike or I don't like it, but I never leave the kid wondering, "Are you mad at me?" I never do that because that wouldn't be fair to him. But, I'm sorry, I'm not gonna let you throw that out the window. You know and I'm gonna look at you like I'm looking at you. And then I have to also let them know I still care about you. But I also care about this window. And I also care that my toys are going out the window and I don't like it. And I'm not snatching on them, or I'm not gonna hit 'em. That's definitely out, but I have to have control. And we have a caliber of children nowadays, and not just here at Sam Hill, I mean they're everywhere, where you just can't talk reason with them anymore. You just can't. You have to really show a little sternness in your discipline sometimes. And if I have to sit a kid down and let him see, "We're having fun and I sure would like for you to participate <u>but</u> if

you cannot do what we're doing here, in fairness to the others, I'm sorry. This is just the way I am.

Mary Mason: Redirecting children for behavioral reasons, this is one thing I've been working with quite a bit. And whenever I have a behavior problem in the classroom, I find that redirecting is not always the answer. Because they always seem to find their way back to the same situation, and the problem continues.

Mary Kidwell: I think it depends on the situation. Sometimes, like she said, we have to intervene. Especially when the children don't have that concept or they don't operate that way at home or in their life anywhere else. And we have to let them know that a rule is a matter of fact. And I think they need to be taught certain things and that someone will stop you from doing something bad. Of course, they need to learn to think about the things that they're going to do or how it can be bad. But, like she said, they don't always have an idea if what they're doing is good or bad.

Beverly: I don't think this standard excludes common sense. I think what you all are talking about is common sense. There are common sense situations where you have to intervene and stop something. I don't think that it excludes that. I don't think it describes a utopia where the teacher is sitting back and the world is going on and she's facilitating. I don't think that's what facilitate means. I think it means intervening directly if you have to, but also having opportunities where you're teaching the children to do most of it. But of course they don't come here knowing that, so you have to teach them that. And there are times when you have to show them.

We see some places where dap is unclear, confusing, or insufficient

The analysis of our discussions revealed several areas of dap about which we were confused, wanted more clarity, or needed more information. We recognize that others may not share in our confusion or need more clarification, but we also believe that if we see areas where more information would be helpful, there must be others like us who would agree. Our point throughout this paper is not to criticize NAEYC or the developers of dap, but to offer the point of view of five experienced educators who deal directly and daily with the issues addressed in the document.

We had several questions about certain places in the dap document. Four of our questions are general in nature. The first has to do with the basic notion of developmental appropriateness being the combination of age and individual appropriateness. One of our concerns is with what might be excluded when these two dimensions are specified. We wonder if elements like learning styles, differences in experiences, and differences in culture should not be specifically addressed. We recognize that NAEYC has argued that these are covered under "individual appropriateness," but wonder if the impact of these variables does not deserve more direct attention. We also discussed the apparent paradox of the teacher trying to address both age and individual appropriateness. It seems to us that if NAEYC is defining individual appropriateness as broadly as it does, then age appropriateness would be subsumed under it; that is, if you were individually appropriate, you would necessarily be age appropriate. Mary Kidwell captured this concern in one of her statements:

> Mary Kidwell: Sometimes I look at individual appropriateness and age appropriateness and think those two don't go together. Because if you consider that all three year olds do this and all four year olds do that, then if you have a three year old that can't do what all three year olds are supposed to do, then it doesn't work with the age appropriateness. And you may have 50% of the three year olds who

cannot do the tasks that many people, whether its researchers or whomever, feel that three year olds should be able to do. And if they can't, they're behind. And to me the individual appropriateness allows for that over the age appropriateness.

A second general area in the document with which we have concern is the dichotomous relationship set up between "appropriate" and "inappropriate" practices. We see it as troublesome, and in some ways unfair, to teachers to divide the complex world of teaching into the "black and white" world inferred by this either/or approach. As Beverly summarized above, "I wish I knew other words they could use [instead of appropriate and inappropriate] to get at what they're trying to get at." Examples of further discussion follow:

Beverly: If it's black or white, then what we do would not be appropriate. But I think we <u>are</u> appropriate [in the area of "Social-emotional development"].

Amos: You're making an intelligent read as a professional. And that's what you hope that other professionals are doing. But a lot of people treat these as dichotomous--black and white, appropriate or inappropriate; and they don't see any gray area there. That's a problem I think. Maybe one other thing that we're saying is that on most of these issues we're in the gray area. We move around because of individual differences, because of our own experiences and our own teaching styles, because of the kids that we serve, families we serve. So it's not as black and white as some people interpret it.

Mary Kidwell: Um, I think that's too black and white and we're more gray in these areas. And I think teachers have to be.

The third broad area of concern has to do with the sources for the dap perspective. We have questions about whether the theory and research on which it is based are representative of all children, especially of children of color and children of poverty, and if the voices of practitioners were considered as dap was put together. Again, this is not an indictment, but an honest question. Dorothy articulated many of the group's questions in the following statement:

> Dorothy: We want to find out, you know, where most of the information accumulated for dap was taken from? Where did they get most of these guidelines? Where were the children? Did they have children that they monitored in the appropriate social classes? What type of culture did they come from? What type of family? Were they affluent? Were they economically low or what? Or was it just textbook stuff? They have a nice long bibliography here on each section. Was it a study? How did the study go? See it makes a whole lot of difference in many ways to say that these are the types of things that the three-year-old ought to do. It depends on who the three-year-old is and where he lives.

A fourth general area of concern is that the document is limited in its usefulness to teachers because it lacks specific suggestions for how to implement the guidelines it presents. We found several places where we think more specific information would be helpful. Examples follow:

> Beverly: How do you know whether or not you've done enough physical activities, or you have touched on the emotional aspect of your classroom enough, or if you've provided adequate experiences. It just says experiences are provided. I don't know if that would be appropriate or not, if I just have hit and miss here or

there--have you provided sufficient experiences. I think it should say more about adequate or sufficient amounts of experiences, or something like that.

Beverly: I don't think it gives any real concrete help. But it does make you focus. It does make you think about it. If you haven't really thought about it before, these practices, it brings you some light, some things for you to think about. I think that the developmentally appropriate practices as they describe them for developing these social skills are a long term plan. But they don't provide any immediate help for a teacher with immediate problems.

Beverly: [reading] "Teachers work in partnership with parents, communicating regularly to their mutual understanding and greater consistency for children." Now that's just a lot of words. Does that mean making a home visit? Does that mean having a parent in? Does that mean having the parent come in and be on the decision-making part about what happens with their children and what their educational goals are. Does it mean volunteering in the classroom, or relating information to the children about the unit goals, and getting information back from the parent? We need more specifics.

Two less general areas of concern emerged in our analysis. One specific area of concern is the description, under appropriate "Teaching Strategies," of the provision of "concrete learning activities with materials and people relevant to [children's] own life experiences" (Bredekamp, 1987, p. 54). Our concern centers around the differences in life experiences of "inner-city" versus more "mainstream" children. Our position is one of uncertainty about the extent to which we should broaden the experiences of our children by providing novel opportunities that are not necessarily tied to their present life experiences. Examples of our discussions on this topic follow:

Mary Kidwell: I'm thinking about the airport which we're going to do this week. Besides seeing a jet or a plane up in the sky, you know, a lot of the children don't have any other direct experience.

Beverly: You're gonna make these experiences. Not make them, but make the children more aware of these activities in their regular life, in their own lives. But I think prior to going to the airport they might or might not have paid much attention to airplanes. But Mary's going to give some very good concrete activities, I'm sure. But the ones with the airplane, how relevant is that to their own experiences? They don't fly anywhere. So with that being tacked on, unless they wanted to say, "concrete learning and materials and you bring an awareness of this." You broaden the child's scope when you do that.

Dorothy: Including cultural kinds of things.

Beverly: But I'm just saying it sounds like that this is reading like you ought to provide activities and materials and people that are important to me, already. Not <u>will be</u> important to me.

Amos: But let me just...I don't know about the airport, but the discussion is important. Maybe the issue is if we're trying to enrich the lives of kids, maybe it wouldn't appear to be relevant to the child on the face of it, but maybe we ought to do that anyway.

A final specific concern has to do with the lack of emphasis on the importance of family and community in the dap document. Beverly, Dorothy, and both Marys work in

new institutions in Knoxville called "Family Community Centers." Under the umbrella of the public school system, these centers are closely linked to the communities in which they are located, providing services to children and their families that go well beyond those supplied in traditional school settings. It is understandable, therefore, that we are sensitive to the document's lack of attention to the importance of family and community:

> Mary Kidwell: There's just not enough. It has one little statement [on parent-teacher relations]. There needs to be a whole chapter designated to that.
>
> Beverly: Or at least two or three of these columns. Mary Kidwell was saying that we need to include not only parents but the family--the total family and then the community. Which is what we try to do at this facility, bringing the community in for its responsibility.
>
> Amos: Yeah. There's no talk about it, is there?
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> Beverly: There needs to be, we need to contribute that.
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> Mary Kidwell: There definitely needs to be more of that if they revise the text to change the role of the community.
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> Beverly: You can't separate the child from it. That's what we're talking about. Sending him right back out . . .
>
> Dorothy: Out into his own environment.

Beverly: The businesses and the stores and the neighborhood--what's all around the kid. It used to be like that.

We struggle with issues about how our "inner-city" settings are the same as and different from "mainstream" schools and communities.

Dorothy: I had a little girl tell me one time about how she cried, "Lord help me get out of this bathroom fore my momma kill me." You know, just, that's true. This is what she goes through. So, you're bringing this on a five-year-old mind and knowing that, "Once I leave this wonderful teacher and this wonderful classroom and all these wonderful toys, I got to go back to this, you know a few hours, and hopefully I can sleep fore I get my head knocked off. And maybe I'll get back here tomorrow for another day of relief." You know? So that's emotion. And you got to deal with that--got to deal with that.

Stories like this were an important part of our conversations about what it's like to try to implement dap in the settings where we work. We know that many of the children who come to our schools face great difficulties. Still, we are reluctant to tell such stories because we do not want to contribute to stereotypical perceptions that inner-city homes, communities, and schools are terrible places where children are "at-risk" at every turn. We know the strengths of our families, communities, and schools, and we do not want to leave these stories out of this report.

For us, it's a paradox. Many of our children live in conditions characterized by poverty, poor housing, violence, racism, and limited hope for improving their futures. We know they need special services and support; and yet we do not want to label them or their families as "deficient" in some way or to think of them as "at-risk," thereby treating them in ways that serve to stigmatize them and set up opportunities for fulfilling our own

prophesies about their perceived limitations. In this report, we are especially sensitive to the possibility that by revealing conditions like those Dorothy mentioned above we may be perpetuating stereotypes that stigmatize inner-city families and communities. Further, we do not want to make blanket statements about the inappropriateness of dap for our settings because we think that in many ways dap fits well.

Our approach has been to describe, but not evaluate in a judgmental way, "reality" as we experience it through our contacts with children and our communities and schools. We believe there are more similarities than differences between "inner-city" and "mainstream" children and have made a conscious effort to include the many positive aspects of the lives of our children in our discussions. What follows is an edited conversation made up of pieces of many talks that took place throughout the course of our study:

> Beverly: I think the dap practice suggests more loose, child initiated...more freedom in discovery kinds of environments in the classroom. And I think what we're saying in terms of children who come from a different kind of environment is that they may find themselves lost or slower to catch on to what you wanted them to do here. You want me to make sense of this, this classroom when you have so many different things for me to deal with--wherein my home, maybe my home life or my home environment is more structured, more limited. And I think that's something for us to think about: Should we limit his experiences here because we think his environment at home is limited? DAP says give him a lot of language and a lot of discussion and a lot of verbal feedback, and you know we don't get that when a child comes to us and kind of looks at you and you're trying to talk and you're not getting much response. Well instead of interpreting that as slow, maybe he's used to quick, one-word sentences. You got working parents who don't

have a lot of time for a lot of interaction. He just doesn't know how to have an extended conversation with you. Not that he can't.

Mary Mason: Or maybe he's nonverbal at home.

Beverly: But see I'm still not saying that because he's like that at home, his environment in the classroom should be like that too.

Mary Kidwell: No, but I think a lot of it falls on teachers. Like you said, in some children's homes, a lot of times the parent is responsible for what goes on in that child's life--where he can go, what he can do. And they limit them more than other parents might limit their children. And if the child comes into the classroom and has to limit himself and doesn't have someone else to control that, then it's going to take him a lot longer to figure it out. To be able to manage on his own. And that's where I think the teacher comes in. And the teacher has to learn to work with the child and structure it first, or structure a whole lot at first, and eventually let go of that and let the child learn responsibility for managing activities and ideas.

Beverly: That's right.

Hatch: Some people argue that children from inner-city backgrounds should have a more directed approach--a more skill-based approach. That whole language is more appropriate for kids from more enriched environments. That somehow these "poor" kids need the structure that a directed approach gives. That they can't operate in a whole language setting. What do you think of that?

Mary Kidwell: I disagree.

Beverly: I do too. I don't know if I disagree because I don't know if people think that we don't have much time for this: "His only instruction is gonna be what we give him, the poor kid. So we need to get right down to basics with him." That could be some of the rationale. But I think there's another hidden agenda that somehow poor kids can't appreciate the aesthetics or the larger scope of things--that that's too much for him to deal with. That you need to steer your discussion and get right to it. You're going to teach letters, let's teach each one. We need to direct instruction. Not that something's wrong with his brain, but that all the time he has in instruction is what he's gonna get here. Where other kids are going to be talked to at the grocery store. They're gonna have all these other things going on and it can make him better able to relate to all the things going on in the classroom and this larger way of looking at things in the classroom. But I still think a poor kid can appreciate the broader way of looking at things if you just show it to him. I think some of them do it better.

Dorothy: I agree. He can't do it because he's never had a chance. Any kid, if you expose him to something, he's gonna learn whatever you expose him to. If these inner-city children or the poor kids were given the chance, he's going to learn what's in his environment. If you put him in front of a computer every single minute of the day, that's what he's gonna know. If that's part of his environment, he's gonna go back to the tube, he's gonna go back to the street. He's gonna know that part, too.

Beverly: The poor child might be doing more discriminating and classifying and hypothesizing in his day-to-day environment than the average middle-class kid. So

don't think you can't get him in here and take him through the scientific method because he's poor.

Mary Kidwell: And I think the key words in here are meaningful and important. And I look at units and things. If there's a meaningful unit, an important unit, I get into it. I learn more about it myself. I teach more. I feel better about it and I know the children get more out of it.

Dorothy: I think that the poor kid, whatever you want to call it, inner-city kid, I think would probably be more intelligent than maybe the middle-class kid because of the environment that he's coming from, which most of the time is hostile. And he's learned survival skills--to be able to manipulate and to negotiate and whatever else he has to do to survive on the streets. And he knows what road to take and what not, and that this is not a firecracker going off, but a gun, and I got to duck, whatever. And then if you allow him the opportunity and everything that the middle-class kid gets in this particular time frame, you know he's got two things going here: He's got his social environment out here that he can survive in; and then he's also got this educational environment that he's got to survive in, if given the chance.

Beverly: I guess the question is: Can these kids transfer these skills to a particular situation? Some people are saying no they can't. And then there are others, I guess, like us who think they can.

Dorothy: At the very beginning, you have to get them at the very beginning. For the last 20 years, children of the inner city just haven't had the chance to develop academically. So now you still tag on the old "high risk" label--you know

"incapable of learning." But they've just never been given a chance to prove they can learn, because all children are intelligent.

Beverly: We had one little girl, I guess about 2 or 3 years ago, but she was a 3rd grader at Woodland (Elementary School), and would come by here and pick up two preschool-age kids, and there were two babies in their apartment. And that little girl used to fry chicken. Now you talk about negotiating and knowing how hot is the skillet and how much to put in it and when to feed. She fixed bottles. I mean it was a real bad case that human services got involved in, but we found out she was taking care of the family and she was a third grader. And I don't know how many years she had been doing it. Probably ever since she was big enough to do anything. But I don't know why those skills could not have been transferred to school skills. You know she could have attended to school problems and used her "home" skills to figure them out. So I think that's one of the things that give them an advantage: they might have more opportunities to have to negotiate, think through, examine, solve problems--instead of just a freelance life of everything I want goes and not to have to do a whole lot of thinking about anything.

Mary Mason: We were having a couple of problems in my four-year-old classroom. And what I've tried to do is incorporate an "I am special" activity. And this is when that child is able to come up and tell something he did after he got home. And it's interesting the conversations they come up with. One little girl said, "I got on my bicycle and I rode in the street." They go home and the parents just send them outside. They do whatever they want in the neighborhood. And to her, this was just fantastic. I said, "Was someone watching you?" She says, "No, my mommy was in the house." So, I guess she's learning to be independent and I want to try to bring what's important at home into my classroom.

Beverly: You know, you hear teachers say, "Oh, I was teaching out in the county" (some rich area) "and I didn't have to deal with all that you have to do." Well what did you have to deal with? You know what I'm saying? We want inner-city children to have the same recognition for their strengths that we give other children. And I think we get caught up and bogged down with dealing with their deficits because they are inner-city kids. And I think that's one thing as a group that we want folks to know from looking at these practices is that all inner city kids are not the way a lot of people want to paint them. And that they do have strengths and a lot of them are smart. I don't believe that you would have to work any harder on this Woodland child than you would a Bricksworth (middle-class school) child. It's just something different. He's energetic, so is this Bricksworth child. He might not be as cognitively directed as the Bricksworth child, but with the proper stimulation and exposure, he can be.

Conclusions and Implications

In this paper, we use our own voices to tell our story of how dap fits our practices. We recognize that some will see our story as idiosyncratic and unrelated to anything beyond our specific circumstances. While that may be true at some level, we believe that others can learn from our experiences doing this collaborative study. We believe that when others hear and read our words, their perspectives on dap and their own practices may be enriched. It may be that they will connect with our story because they have had experiences like ours, have worried over some of the same issues as us, or have faced some of the same problems we have had to deal with. Others may learn from our work by thinking differently about school settings and communities with which they are not familiar. Still others may learn because they have never considered questioning dap as anything other than "the word." In any case, we are committed to the idea that the

perspectives of front-line educators have a place in the dialog about what constitutes appropriate early childhood education. This presentation and paper give us the opportunity to have our voices heard.

As we neared the end of formal data gathering, we recorded a session that concluded with our spontaneous assessments of how our practices and philosophies match with dap. Part of that conversation follows:

> Mary Mason: I feel I'm developmentally appropriate. However, my developmentally appropriate seemed to differ somewhat from NAEYC standards.
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> Beverly: I immediately think right and wrong when I think appropriate and inappropriate. And maybe I shouldn't, but it gives me that connotation of right and wrong. And I think that's why we have a problem with some of dap because we don't think that it's all right or that the things we do are all wrong.
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> Mary Kidwell: And in different situations, I think that what they say is inappropriate, could be appropriate.
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> Beverly: I think my overall impression is that they are good standards that fit on a continuum such as Amos described with the whole language approach. They are things that we all should, for the most part, work towards. I don't see it being conceivable overall that anyone could practice to the letter all of the appropriate practices. But I do think that they are worthy enough to work towards and find yourself a happy medium within what works with your group of children. Looking at what's appropriate and stopping where you need to stop or intervening with some of the practices that they describe as inappropriate but that work well for your group.

Mary Mason: I found some of the things most appropriate. And these could be incorporated within our curriculum today, and I think that it would work really well. And then others, I would have to disagree on. But I, on the whole, I would say most of what we do is appropriate, thinking about today and the direction that we're going in.

Dorothy: I agree. I agree with her and Beverly. I agree. You know there are some things that I'm concerned with, but I think they have the children in mind. Overall, I think it's okay, you know I'm picking on lots of things I think are unnecessary. But overall I think it's okay.

Mary Kidwell: I agree that the appropriate practice is something that we should all strive for. However, it's inconceivable, almost impossible to meet all of those, especially under certain conditions, like the way this school system is set up, or with the policy of the school, or because of certain situations or ideas. But overall, I believe we should strive for developmentally appropriate. They have the best interests of children at heart.

It should be clear from these comments that it is neither our intent, nor our inclination, to attack dap. We direct our implications not to NAEYC, but to early childhood practitioners. We know that dap is being revised, and based on what we know, we think it will be improved. Still, no document will ever be able to provide the magic formula for appropriate early childhood practices. People set up environments, plan experiences, select materials, and interact with children; and professional people use all of the resources, knowledge, and skills at their command to provide the best programs they can. Professionals make decisions constantly about how to do, what to do, and when to do. A

major factor in good decisions is the ability to analyze the special circumstances in which things are to be done and to generate alternatives that make sense in those particular circumstances. Knowing about dap (or any formula for evaluating programs) can be helpful, but to make decisions based on dap without analyzing the particulars of the contexts involved ignores the importance of teachers' abilities to engage in professional decision making--that is, to decide how to do, what to do, and when to do in the special settings in which they do their work.

We recommend that all early childhood educators take a close look at dap and see how it compares to their own teaching practices. Like us, we expect others to find places where there is agreement, where outside constraints keep them from being "appropriate," where disagreements occur, and where more guidance or clarification would be helpful. More importantly, we think it is healthy to go beyond asking, "Are we developmentally appropriate?" to questions like, "What constitutes appropriate practice here?"

Reference

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